

## Principled Living (Part 4): Giving of Ourselves

### Being Living Sacrifices

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War is an intrinsically selfish endeavor, but on a grand scale. It is one nation, or one cause against another. Both of the sides want the same thing, whether land, economic advantage, or minerals, etc; they are struggling over it for themselves. They want it and want to keep it from the other guy.

Even so, war has been the backdrop for many *selfless deeds*. It is a kind of paradox. Here you have this activity that is essentially selfish, but individual heroes come out of it—men and now women—who do selfless things for their comrades in arms.

I read a great deal about war in my life. I particularly like to read about the Civil War, as well as the Revolutionary War, and Europe's Napoleonic Wars—a 60 or 70 year period of war (in Western Civilization) that is of interest to me.

It is hard to go anywhere in history without reading about war. There have only been a few years where war has not occurred somewhere in the world. And I like history, so I end up reading about war.

Someday, we are told, we will not be learning that sort of thing anymore. But, in this society and in this world, war is real.

There are many examples of heroism and self-sacrifice displayed in those very bloody wars. These were wars that were fought with advanced weaponry, but the tactics really had not caught up with it. Slaughter was just the name of the game.

These wars were fought with cannon shot, shell, and canister. Men were still using muskets along with their rifles and they were still attaching bayonets. The cavalry units were still bearing their sabers. War is terrible whichever way it is fought, and these were very bloody and very personal wars.

Modern warfare is fought differently. It is a bit more remote—from longer range. But, it still brings out conspicuous acts of bravery and selflessness.

I have a story, here, of a Congressional Medal of Honor winner from the Viet Nam conflict. I want to read his citation which I found on the Congressional Medal of Honor website. This was U.S. Marine Corps Private First Class Gary W. Martini who served in Viet Nam, and his act of heroism took place on April 21, 1967:

Elements of Company F while conducting offensive operations at Bin San encountered a firmly entrenched enemy force, and immediately deployed to engage them. The Marines in PFC Martini's platoon assaulted across an open rice paddy to within twenty meters of the

enemy trench line where they were suddenly attacked by hand grenades, intense small arms, automatic weapons, and mortar fire. The enemy onslaught killed fourteen, and wounded eighteen Marines, pinning the remainder of the platoon down behind a low paddy dike. In the face of immanent danger PFC Martini immediately crawled over the dike to a forward open area within fifteen meters of the enemy position where continuously exposed to hostile fire he rolled hand grenades killing several of the enemy. Crawling back through the intense fire he rejoined his platoon which had moved to the relative safety of a trench line. From this position he observed several of his wounded comrades lying helpless in the fire swept paddy. Although he knew that one man had been killed attempting to assist the wounded, PFC Martini raced through the open area, and dragged a comrade back to a friendly position. In spite of a serious wound received during this first daring rescue he again braved the unrelenting fury of the enemy fire to aid another companion lying wounded only twenty meters in front of the enemy trench line. As he reached the fallen Marine he received a mortal wound. But, disregarding his own condition he began to drag the Marine toward his platoon's position. Observing men from his unit attempting to leave the security of their position to aid him, concerned only for their safety, he called to them to remain under cover; and through a final supreme effort moved his injured comrade to where he could be pulled to safety before he fell succumbing to his own wounds. Stout-hearted and indomitable PFC Martini unhesitatingly yielded his life to save two of his comrades and ensure the safety of the remainder of his platoon. His outstanding courage, valiant fighting spirit, and selfless devotion to duty reflected the highest credit upon himself, the Marine Corps, and the U.S. Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.

This story—you may want to call it a martial example of John 15:13: "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends"—illustrates the fourth of our major principles of Christian Living. As Christ's disciples we have been called to a life of sacrifice—giving of ourselves—of putting our lives on the line for God, for our brethren, and for the ultimate good of all.

Like I said, this is the fourth of the Principled Living sermons that I have given. The first is Following Christ, the second Conquering Sin, the third is Growing in Righteousness, and now this fourth one I have titled, "Giving of Ourselves."

Part of that first sermon in this series touched on this subject. We are commanded by Jesus in Luke 9:23 to deny ourselves, to take up our cross, and to follow Him. And if you will remember that sermon, I spoke a great deal about what that meant—to take up one's cross, and follow Him.

I do not want to belabor the point. But in that first sermon, I emphasized following Christ to the uttermost, even to death if need be.

Now, in this sermon I do not want to concentrate necessarily on that aspect of sacrificing unto death. I wish to emphasize sacrificial giving as a way of life. In fact Paul calls it our reasonable or spiritual service in Romans 12:1. We are going to be in this part of the Bible for a while because I want to tear this particular verse apart so that we can understand the full force of what Paul was trying to get across to us here.

Now if you know anything about the organization of the book of Romans, Paul spends basically the first 11 chapters laying a doctrinal foundation for the church of God. Most of the major doctrines can be found there in principle even if they are not fully articulated.

Romans 12:1-2 provide an introductory bit into the practical areas of the book of Romans where he gives us advice on Christian living. And, these particular verses lay down three basic principles that we need in all of that practical application of Christianity. So these two verses are a preamble to his advice about Christian living and provide the foundation and set the stage for the more detailed instruction to follow.

These things that he says are the basic attitudes we must possess to live as Christians. And it is the first, and I think probably the most important principle, which we are going to be dealing with today: We are to be living, holy, acceptable sacrifices to God.

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service.

Now, as I just did, we can read this very quickly. And because we read it quickly—whether to get on to the next bit, or because we are trying to read so much—we can miss a great deal! So, to organize this expository speaking about this particular verse, I have organized this into six points that we can, and often do, miss if we go through this too quickly.

The first one is we can fail to catch Paul's emotion.

Now, it is understandable when we think that he has just given 11 chapters of doctrine. Doctrine tends to be a little bit dry. But, when he opens up chapter 12, with all of the practical applications of the doctrine, his mood changes. His emotions come to the surface. We probably miss the desperation and sobriety of the word *beseech*. That is where his emotion is seen most of all. Because it is an older word (we do not use it very often today, it is archaic to most of us), we do not understand the depth of feeling that can be in this one word.

It is not simply that he is asking us. It is not that he is just requesting us to do something. What he is saying is, "*I beg of you...*, *I implore you...*, *I entreat you...*," or "*I plead with you...*" All of these are acceptable translations of this particular Greek word. It is something more than just him asking us to do something. He is verbally down on his knees urging us to do this for our own good. His entreaty, here, is really actually heart-rending.

So, we need to understand that Paul is putting his whole being into this, trying to urge us with everything that is within him to get us to do this. "*This is what we need to do,*" he is saying. "*If nothing else in your life, get this.*"

The second thing that we can fail to catch is that we can fail to appreciate why he beseeches us to do this. All these points are found in just one or two words. That is why it is so easy to miss them. The reason is contained in the phrase, "by the mercies of God." Maybe today we would say, "because of the mercies of God." But that is the reason that he gives for imploring us to become living sacrifices.

He requests this of us because God has extended mercy. And notice that it is not just mercy, but it is plural. And, Paul, being a Benjamite and Hebrew, understood the way that Hebrews talked. When they made something plural like this, it acts like a superlative. It makes it more emphatic. It expands it, and heightens it. It is something more than just mercy. It is not just mercy, but multiple and utterly undeserved and astounding mercies. It is as if Paul is trying to cram all of God's grace, and everything that He has ever done for us into this one phrase, "the mercies of God."

In other words, we are to become living sacrifices because God has already done so much for us; and these are all contained in the mercies of God. He called us, He forgave us, He justified us, He bestowed upon us the Holy Spirit, He gave us blessings, He strengthens us, He motivates us, He continues to reveal things to us—and on, and on. We could go on and on with things that He does for us every day—simple things like providing food, and clothing, and shelter, and transportation, and safety on the roads. Everything in your life is an extension of those mercies of God. Everything that happens to you is due to the mercies of God.

And so Paul is saying here, *"I urge you to do this because of all the things that God has done for you! You owe God big time (We would say in our modern language)! Would you rather be where you were? Or, would you rather be where God has placed you given all the things that He has allowed you to have and to do, and also have this responsibility and obligation?"*

He is telling us the answers to the questions. He is saying that this is far better than where we were, even if we have to do all this. So, he beseeches us to do this because of God's mercies.

The third thing we might fail to catch is that we can fail to realize the background or backdrop of his appeal. Now, what had happened in Romans 9, 10, and 11? He had asked the question, *"What about Israel? Where are they in this new covenant? What is going to happen to all those who had so much revealed and given to them?"*

He had just ended that in chapter 11, verse 36. And now, here we are in the very next verse, chapter 12, verse 1, and he still has Israel on his mind. That is the backdrop for his appeal.

So, he is thinking of these Israelites in the way that they were under the old covenant. And, if you will remember, under the Old Covenant the Israelites presented live animals to be killed on the altar. The animal died. Once its throat was cut and the blood went out, it was dead (no longer of any use). Paul continues (if we believe Paul wrote the book of Hebrews) speaking about all those animal sacrifices that were done, and then concludes that they did not accomplish anything. They could not remit one sin. Lives were given in the millions, but they did not do any good. There might have been some good, but for the most part it did not do anything for them. It was just a shadow and type of the great sacrifice to be made by Jesus Christ.

So, in thinking about this old covenant practice of dead sacrifices, he turns to the new way, under Jesus Christ, which allows us to present ourselves as a living sacrifice—one that is useful beyond the sacrifice to our High Priest and to God. A living sacrifice is one that can be made often, and should be made often, and always by a Christian because that is the life that he has been called to.

So, we need to understand this background that under the Old Covenant they were dead sacrifices that were basically useless, except as a teaching vehicle to look ahead. But, under the New Covenant, we are the sacrifices, and we can be living sacrifices and a continual sweet savor to God.

The fourth point: We can fail to consider the totality of our sacrifice. This is found in the phrase, "your bodies..." He says "offer or present your bodies..." Now, this is the simple Greek word in the plural, *soma*. It just means "body." Offer your body...present your body... But, he uses it as a figure of speech. This figure of speech is *metonymy* which means one noun replaces another (it stands for another).

Now, we do this when we replace the term, "United States," with, "Uncle Sam." It is a bit of personification on one hand, but it is one noun replacing another. And we all know that when you say, "Uncle Sam," you really mean, "The United States." Well, Paul is doing the same thing with the word *soma* (body) here. It replaces the word selves—present yourselves.

Now, this is why we had to understand the backdrop of the old covenant sacrifices. They presented a dead body on the altar. Paul is saying that we have to present a living body—not just your physical body, but your complete person—your whole being.

Paul may have done this because he has already applied "our will" when he used the word present. You cannot present yourself as a living sacrifice without an act of will. So the will has already been alluded to with those words.

On the other hand you can look at it this way, that our bodies can do nothing without our will. Your will is involved in all that your body does. It does not do things on it is own. Even to think you have to use the brain, which is part of the body.

So, you can do nothing apart from your body in the way Paul is thinking here. So, he uses the word "body" to show that it is everything; everything that you do from the hair on your head all the way down to the sole of your feet. It is everything. You give it all. Not just your body, but your mind, your spirit—everything.

So, God is asking us through Paul to give ourselves wholly and completely. So, I say that we can fail to understand and grasp the totality of the sacrifice.

The fifth thing: We can fail to understand the qualifications of the sacrifice. This is found in the words, "holy," and "acceptable to God." Paul says that our living sacrifice has to be holy and acceptable to God. Holy covers both aspects of being set apart, dedicated or consecrated for a specific use, as well as the idea of purity—being clean and unblemished.

Remember that the background is the Old Testament sacrifices again. And, the sacrifices had to be holy and without blemish. They had to be pure. God would only accept certain kinds of

sacrifices. And then, of course, the "acceptable to God" backs up "holy." This means that if they are not holy, and if they are not without blemish, then God will not accept them.

So, he says "holy," meaning both set apart and pure (unblemished), and then backed up with "acceptable to God."

God accepts only those offerings that are made according to His will. That is what he means through "acceptable to God." They would not be acceptable to God if they were not given in the way that He asked them to be given.

So, this "acceptable to God," then, helps us to understand that the sacrifice that we give must be given according to His will, according to His instructions and according to His standards.

Now, let us think for a few minutes about the Old Covenant offerings. We will not go through Leviticus chapters 1 through 5. However, generally, they had to be a certain animal, depending on your station in life, depending on your economic ability, depending upon the sin or the reason why you are making a sacrifice or offering. So, it had to be a certain animal and only clean animals. It had to be of a certain age. Oftentimes, it had to be a bullock, or a lamb. And, once they were more than 1 year old, they are no longer a lamb or bullock. They are now a bull or sheep.

They had to be without blemish of any kind. If they had a torn ear, or whatnot, you could not offer it. If they had some sort of scab or disease, you could not offer it. Even if they were of the correct type of animal, and the correct age, it would not be acceptable.

They had to be killed a certain way. They had to be offered a certain way. And, if you were going to offer something with it, or along side it, as oftentimes they were required to do those things had to be prepared according to God's instruction as well whether oil, wine, grain, salt, absence of leavening or honey (two things that tend to corrupt under heat), and other such rules about these things.

Understand that the same principles apply to New Testament sacrifices as to the Old Testament sacrifices. They had to be holy, set apart, dedicated, consecrated, and pure. This is an offering that is acceptable to God. If they do not meet these qualifications, then they are not acceptable to God.

If you were to help a lady across the street, you do not have to offer a grain offering along side that. That is not what I am getting at. These things under the New Testament changed in their application. The holiness and the purity have to do with inner things of the heart—one's relationship with God, one's dedication to God, one's attitudes, and motives.

If we do them properly, and rightly, they will be acceptable to God. Otherwise, we are just futilely doing dead works.

So, the same principle applies to both types of sacrifices. I want you to see this. Under the New Covenant our living sacrifices have to be just as correct and pure, if not more so.

In James 1:27, the apostle is thinking the same thing as Paul did in Romans 12.

James 1:27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is

this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

But, there is a quality to this sort of work that has to go into it to make it pure and undefiled before God, and therefore acceptable.

Turn to Ephesians 5, to the section on marriage. I want you to hear what Paul actually says here about what is happening with us:

Ephesians 5:25-27 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify [set it apart] and cleanse her [make it pure] with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

We become that way through the cooperative effort of ourselves being a living sacrifice and the help of Jesus Christ and God the Father. This is how we become true and sincere living sacrifices.

One more in the book of Colossians chapter 1, verse 21. I want you to see that the Apostles used the same verbiage about us in our works, and in our state, and our goal as they used in the Old Testament under the Old Covenant sacrifices.

Colossians 1:21-22 And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight...

And, that is a continuing work that is going on in us. So, if you get anything from that point, just understand that a New Covenant sacrifice has the same qualifications, but heightened, because now it is for all the marbles. We have a much greater goal before us.

The final thing (sixth) that we could fail to grasp (from Romans 12) is that this giving of ourselves as a living sacrifice is the essence of true worship. This is the gist from the phrase, "which is your reasonable service." This is a very interesting set of words.

The word "reasonable" in our New King James, or in the King James Version comes from the Greek word "*logikos*." It is where English gets its word "logic." It means "reasoned." It also means "thinking things through rationally."

It implies something that is true and fitting, or corresponding one to another. So, if you have A plus B, it should come out as C, using logic. You think things through using a certain process, and it comes out as a reasoned answer. Paul is saying that you lay all your things in a row, and this is what it comes out to be, this is what you should do: You should give yourself as a living sacrifice.

Now, this word can also mean "spiritual." The reason why it can also mean spiritual is that it can be thought of in terms of being rational, or of being thoughtful. This is better, it means: reasoned through one's beliefs, and therefore, it becomes spiritual.

Now, it does not necessarily say, in the definition, what one's beliefs are. We know that people can have spiritual thoughts, but come up with totally wrong answers. But, with what they know, and what they believe, they come up with that particular conclusion. And to them, it is logical.

Now, of course, if you have the right belief, and the right process of working with this information, then you will come up with the right, true, godly, truly spiritual answer—which is what Paul comes up with here. That is why some translators have decided to use the word "spiritual" here.

Now, the other word we need to understand here is the word "service," which in the Greek is *latreia*. It is actually a technical term, and, it is the term that the Jews used in this era for the Temple rituals. It is what they used for what was done at the Temple in offering the sacrifices.

So, as such, it is service rendered to God, but more so, it is service as God requires and commands it. That is what they were doing at the Temple. They did everything according to the format and instructions of God found in the Old Testament. And so it is not just service, it is service to God. And it is service to God by all the rules and regulations that He has set down.

To put it simply, it is service to God as He accepts it; it is service to God through the 10 Commandments; it is service to God through all the principles of His Word. It is doing His Will. It is the logical conclusion that we should come to in terms of what we need to do because of what God has done for us. Now, in short, it is righteous activity that honors God.

Get that word righteous in there! It is *righteous activity* that honors God. It is not free-lance worship that we *think* honors Him. Remember Nadab and Abihu? They made fatal mistakes because they did not honor God. They did not do righteously according to what God said was acceptable worship. They used common (profane) fire [when they should have used fire from God's altar.]

What about Uzza? He thought he was worshipping God by helping to take the Ark of God back to Jerusalem in a cart. But, there were instructions in the Law that said how to do such a thing. But, he and his family, and David, committed a great sin because they did not do it properly. And when Uzza tried to steady the Ark with his hand, God struck him down. That was the end. It was not righteous activity. It was what they *thought* would honor God, but it did not. God was actually very angry that they had chosen to worship Him in a way that He had not prescribed at all.

This is the end of our discussion of Romans 12:1. But before we go I want to read this from the Amplified Bible, because I think that whoever translated that did a very good job of catching the essence of this verse.

So here it is from the Amplified Bible:

Romans 12:1 (Amplified Bible) I appeal to you, therefore, brethren, and beg of you in view of all the mercies of God to make a decisive

dedication of your bodies presenting all your members and faculties as a living sacrifice, holy, devoted, consecrated, and well pleasing to God which is your reasonable, rational, intelligent service and spiritual worship.

That made a paragraph out of it. But he got in just about everything that I said in those six points above.

Let us see what Jesus has to say about this back in John 15. If you will remember from the last sermon, I was in John 15, verses 1 through 8 quite a bit toward the end of that message. Because, in John 15:1-8, Jesus instructs us to remain attached to the Vine, and bear fruit to glorify the Father. It said there in verse 8:

John 15:8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

Now, He shows us how this fruit is produced. We will start in verse 9, and go down through verse 17:

John 15:9-17 As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another.

He tells us here how fruit is produced. His explanation and instruction here is to abide and continue to live in love. That is how real fruit is produced—by continuing and abiding in love.

Now, in verses 9 and 10, it shows a chain here. The Father loved Jesus, and Jesus loved His disciples. He says that He abides in His Father's love, and if the disciples keep His commandments, then they will abide in His love.

So, what He is doing here, actually, is giving us great assurance. He says, "*Look, I am with you. If you abide in My love I will be there for you.*" And He said, "*Just as God was there for Me when I needed Him because I abide in His love, so will I be there for you if you abide in My love.*"

See, this should have given them, and us, a great deal of confidence because there is this chain of Godly love—agape—that goes from the Father, to the Son, and then to us. And if we are in the vine and linked up—abiding in His love—we have all that power. We have all that love to share, to use, to make the most of, to grow, and to produce fruit. That is what He is getting at. And ultimately it is supposed to come out to the glorification of God.

Now notice also that He says here, in verse 10 especially, that abiding in His love requires us to keep the 10 commandments. And he says here that it is obedience like His own—just as He kept His Father's commandments, the disciples were to keep His commandments.

So, there is a lot to this. But, commandment keeping is chief among those things that we need to be doing to remain attached to the Vine. And, therefore, to show love. There is no love without keeping the commandments, because His commandments are love. They are a codification of how God acts. God acts in love.

And so if we are not keeping the commandments we do not have the basis for showing love at all. So we keep the commandments so that we know what to do, how to act—because that is how God acts.

So, if we continue in doing this we will have continuous and overflowing joy. That is what He says in verse 11. He told us these things, He says, so that, "My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full."

Now on to verse 12 (and then, He repeats this again in verse 17):

John 15:12 This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Now that last clause there, "as I have loved you..." is very important.

The reason why it is important is because there are many kinds of love. Most of them will not produce what Jesus is trying to get us to produce. There is only one kind of love that will work to produce these fruits. And, that is Jesus' own love. The love that He showed throughout His ministry. And He showed this to His disciples. It is the same kind of love that He displayed in His life.

Verse 13 gives us its highest expression:

John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

What did Jesus do? He not only did it in the greatest and highest sacrifice that has ever been given in His death, but He did this every day of His life. Laying Himself down in self sacrifice, being a living sacrifice to show the people the way to God. To give them instruction, to heal, to cast out demons, to counsel, to do all those things that He did. He showed compassion. He gave people object lessons. Everything that He did was in love—His example.

He did not need to get baptized. But, in His love for us He said, "*We will do it to give everybody*

*an example of what needs to be done to fulfill all righteousness*"—to show us what we need to do.

We can pick up anyplace in the Gospels and find an act of love on Jesus' part. And He is still working that way. Now He is our High Priest at the right hand of God, and He is continuing to act in love to bring us all to where He is. To the same point where we can be glorified with Him.

So, this is the kind of fruit He wants us to bear—the kind that is only produced through living Godly as He did. Perhaps you will recall that I emphasized the need to bear fruit in my last sermon—he is telling them that they need to bear fruit and he says:

John 15:7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

Then, He says the same thing here in verse 16:

John 15:16 ...that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

Now the point that I made in the last sermon is that God is with us to such an extent—He is willing to give us any gift, any grace, any thing that we need in order to produce fruit—that all we need to do is ask!

I think that it is a big problem with us—we do not ask! It is like James says in James 4. (I do not want you to take this personally, necessarily.) He asks, "Where do wars and fights come from among you?" Then he says in verse 2:

James 4:2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain [He is talking about sins that they are continuing to go through]. You fight and war. [And he says the reason is:] Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

I think that it is the same that with us most of the time. Sure, God knows what we have need of, but He likes us to ask Him. He likes us to be able to understand by going through the thinking process of what we actually need. And so, if we need wisdom, James says, "Let him ask of God and He will give it to you."

Do we need a little bit more compassion for our fellow man? Ask Him. Do we need more faith? (Obviously, we all need more faith.) Do you ask Him for it? Do you need more self control? (We *all* need more self control.) Do we need more patience? Do we have problems forbearing with another? What do you need to produce the fruit? To show the love? Ask Him! That is what He says! I mean, this is pretty wide open. What ever you ask the Father in my name, He will give it to you.

Obviously, there are a few stipulations on that. If you ask Him for a Rolls Royce, He probably will not give it to you. It is not what you need. He is not in the business of making us all

multi-millionaires. And we have the bank account to prove it.

But, He is in the business of making Sons of God. And, He will give you what you need to do that—to produce the fruit—to show the love. So, ask Him. He says it often throughout this entire sermon. Look in chapter 14:13:

John 14:13 And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will *do it*.

Then, He mentions it again in verse 7 of chapter 15 and in verse 16 as well as in chapter 16, verse 23:

John 16:23-24 And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. "Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

John 16:26-27 In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God.

Then He says in chapter 17:9:

John 17:9 I pray for them...

...and He asks the Father to give us what we need so that we can be in His Kingdom with Him.

This is a major theme of His sermon, here, right before He was arrested. "*Look guys, I am leaving!*" He says. "*You have not had to ask the Father for things in My name because I have been here to give them to you. But after this, you are not quite on your own, but I will not be here*" He says. "*So ask the Father whatever you need in My name, and He will be sure to give it to you.*"

Anything. Anything that is going to move us along and make us grow, and bring us together when that time comes. Just ask. Allow the Father to give. That is what He does. He is in the giving business. Remember Mr. Armstrong saying that? There was the get way, and the give way. And the get way was Satan's way that we have all come to understand and hate so much, and the give way was God's way, the way of outgoing concern for others. God wants to show you how it is done, and He is willing to give you the things that you ask for that are going to help us to grow.

So like I said, in His last ever so important sermon to His disciples this is one of the main points He wants to get across. This idea of living in love, abiding in His love, keeping His commandments, asking the Father to give you whatever you need so that you can do these

things—so that you could keep His commandment, he said, which is to love one another.

So, stay attached to the True Vine, keep the commandments, give of yourself in love, produce Godly fruit, glorify the Father. They are all just stepping stones.

But, this is not finished.

This was written by the Apostle John, and I guess that he thought he had more to say on the subject in his epistle. Please turn to I John 3, verse 16. Here John is reiterating that point that we saw in John 15. We will read down through verse 23.

I John 3:16-23 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.

Is not that a great summary of John 15: 9-17? He just reiterated all those points once again.

As Jesus laid down His life for us, we in turn should follow His example and sacrifice ourselves for the good of the brethren. That is what He is getting at.

Then, he gives us a very easy to understand example—helping the needy in their troubles, particularly those among us who, "...sees his brother in need..." Charity begins at home, remember?

Well, the home for all of us is the kingdom of God. So, we help those first within the church of God, and then we can expand that out as we have ability.

And James says a very similar thing.

James 2:14-17 What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, *whatdoes it* profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

So, these two Apostles are on the same wave-length. He gives us an example of what we can

do. You find a need... Let me put it this way: You see a need, you fill it. This is just a very simple example of how it really is to show Godly love.

They both say that it is not enough just to say nice things. They make that point very explicitly. John said back (above) in I John 3, "Let us not love in word or tongue, but in deed and in truth."

Many of us only go this far where we say nice things, where we make an offer, but never follow up. I think that in many cases it is because we just do not know what to do. We do not know what will be acceptable. And so our fears and such hold us back. But, perfect love casts out fear, which is said in the next chapter (I John 4), verse 18. There is no fear in love. Perfect love casts out fear because fear involves torment. He who fears has not been made perfect in love. I think that is where many of us are. We are still fearful of one another. We are fearful of stepping on toes, and offending; and that is a good thing in a way. But, on the other hand, if there is a need, it should be filled. And, we should be among the first to fill it.

Now, I am not here to tell you how these things should be done, but just the fact that God says that this is what we should be doing. It is part of our growth to learn how to do these things. It has taken us many years to come even to this point. And, it is going to take us many years to really figure it all out.

Think about God: Think about how He fills our needs. Most of the time, He does it without ever being seen, or heard doing anything; He simply does the job. He does it through mediators or intermediaries. He does it through the natural course of our life.

To Him—just to use this term "giving of alms," "helping the poor," or what have you, is something He does naturally. He does this all the time. He makes no big deal out of it. He does not expect to be lauded in the streets with a trumpet. He just does it.

Most of the things that we receive from Him are just, basically, placed in our laps without us even having to ask. Your daily food is an example. Also, the protection that you have out in the world.

These things just come as a matter of course with Him. Obviously, we pray for them on occasion, and we thank Him for them; I am not saying that that should not be done. But what I am saying is that God's example in giving is instructive. He fills needs. He does it as a part of His nature.

Now, He does things in and with wisdom as well. I do not want to leave that out, either. But, as I have said many times in the past, Christianity is a thinking man's religion. It cannot be done just from emotion. It has to be done thoughtfully. We have to plan things. We have to think them through. We have to really take the time to either get counsel, or to think deeply and logically about something, so that we do not give offense, etc. What I am trying to say is that love is something that we do.

If we are found doing these things, we have nothing to be doubtful about, which John gets into here. We have nothing to be doubtful about in terms of our pleasing Him and being in His kingdom. That is what He says here, "by this we know we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him." If we are doing these things, and practicing them, and growing in them, we do not need to worry about being in the kingdom of God. This is what a God does; it is what a

Son of God does. That is why it is so important to put all these things together: Keeping the commandments, being attached to the Vine, and then doing these things—helping our brethren.

And then, of course, He has to add again, verse 22, another admonition to ask for what we need to do this. It seems like every time this subject comes up, there is an admonition in it for us to ask God for what we need, because we are not going to be able to do any of this without His help.

And then John finishes his little passage here. He says to remember Christ's commandment to us, "Believe Him, and love one another." This is a foundational, fundamental principle. And it is mentioned many times in the scripture.

Let us return to Paul's writings again to I Corinthians 13. Obviously, this is the "Love Chapter." I want to pick up verse 31 of chapter 12 as well.

Paul says after having talked about spiritual gifts:

I Corinthians 12:31 But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

Evidently, the Corinthians had been in a type of competition. They were comparing their gifts to each other. One was saying, "Well, I can do healing." And another says, "Well, I can prophesy." And another one says, "I can speak in tongues." And yet another one says, "I have a gift of administrations." And on, and on, and on... They were trying to figure out just where in the hierarchy of gifts all of these things were.

And Paul says, then, "*Look, we are all in this together. The comely parts, and the uncomely parts all have their job. So, why do not we just forget about all this competition, and desire good gifts, because then you could be more helpful. A person who can heal, can do his healing. And a person who preaches can do his preaching. And a person who serves can do his serving. That is all great.*"

And then he says, "There is a better way."—better than what there were doing with all their competition. And, better even than these gifts.

He says that the way of love, which we know is the topic of chapter 13, is far better than being able to exercise all these gifts, because love must motivate the use of the gifts.

Let us read chapter 13. Let us read the last verse first:

I Corinthians 13:13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love.

This was the answer to I Corinthians 12: 31. The better way is love. Now, back to verse 1:

I Corinthians 13:1-8 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all

mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away.

Love never fails. Love will always be there. Love will always do what is best, and its works will endure—true love.

Obviously, it is the greatest of those Godly attributes, as Paul says there in verse 13. And the essence of it is whole-hearted sacrifice—giving one's self, esteeming others better than ourselves as Paul said in Philippians 2. None of the other gifts means much of anything unless they are motivated by this *agape* love—the love of God.

Now notice that I spoke a great deal (earlier) about giving things to those who are in need. And I said earlier in this and the other sermons about giving our lives in self sacrifice to the death. And Paul says, here in verse 3, that even those things are nothing and are worthless—futile—unless they are motivated by the love of God. So, it is not what you do, necessarily, but how and why you do it.

The doing of the thing is good, yes!, But what motivates it is everything. This is a hard thing. Love is not easy.

Living like God is not easy. We are here in houses of flesh with all these pulls, without really the faculties of mind or body, or the resources to do what we really would like to do. We have a hard time grasping all the principles. We have a hard time grabbing the opportunities which come by because we have something else already going on. We are not like God who can do many things at once. He is not concerned about not having time to do this or that. He has control, and we do not. He has total sovereignty, and we do not. We lack much, and that is why God has given us so many years to try to learn even an inkling of this.

But, high goals produce wonderful results. That is why God has put it up so high for us—to make us stretch, to make us reach for the very character of God in every act that we take, and every word that we say. Like I said, the essence of this is whole-hearted sacrifice.

If we can get ourselves out of the way, then these things become more possible. And with God's help, because He is right there willing to give us all the gifts that we need, and all the strength and motivation that we need to get it done, it can be done.

What Paul describes here, as previously mentioned, is God's very nature. God suffers long, and is kind. God does not envy. God does not parade Himself. God is not proud or puffed up. God

does not behave rudely. God does not seek His own. God is not provoked. God thinks no evil. God does not rejoice in any kind of sin. God rejoices in the truth. God bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things—He has endured us. God never fails.

And that is what He wants us to be—all these things. This is how God acts toward us, and this is how He wants us to behave toward Him, and to our brethren.

And this is why the Great Commandment of the Law, found in Matthew 22 is first absolute, and total love toward God, and then, love toward neighbor. Because, that is what God does. That is His mind, and His character.

Let us finish in I John 4. I am going to read these five verses, 7 through 11:

I John 4:7-11 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

So now, to "Following Christ," "Conquering Sin," "Growing in Righteousness," we have added a fourth principle of Christian living, "Giving of Ourselves."